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# Via LaborPress.org: The Labor Movement 'Must Lead The Opposition' To White Supremacy

Published Friday, August 18, 2017  
by Joe Maniscalco/LaborPress.org



Labor Leaders *across the nation* are *speaking out* in the wake of the racist violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, and *declaring* that Trade Unionists **must lead the fight against** the rise of White Supremacy in Donald Trump's U.S.A.

**"The attacks in Charlottesville (Virginia) show the violence of racism and White Supremacy,"**  
**Teamsters Joint Council 16**

**President George Miranda said in a statement. "We stand with Charlottesville and honor the memory of Heather Heyer. We also know that our Union and the Labor Movement must lead in the fight against White Supremacy."**

Miranda also noted that the establishment *has always sought to divide* Workers **based on race.**

**"Unions are the 'voice of equality and justice' in the workplace — 'it is our responsibility to unite the Working Class for racial and economic justice,'" Miranda continued.**

**John Samuelsen, the International president of the Transport Workers Union of America (TWU), called racism a "blight" on the nation.**

**"The Trade Union Movement, which has led so many fights for equality, should be a visible and vocal force denouncing these un-American White Supremacist Groups that perpetrated the violence in Charlottesville," Samuelsen said in an e-mail. "Unions are Working Men and Women of all colors and creeds standing together to collectively defend and advance their livelihoods. That's America, not those haters who once again demonstrated how much work still needs to be done to stamp out racism in America."**

**Shaun Francois, who heads American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 372 and serves as Vice President of District Council 37, told LaborPress that Labor can, indeed, play a major role in the fight against racist hatred - the same way it did back in the turbulent 1960s.**

**"Labor can play a major role just like it did back in 1968 when they had the Sanitation Strike (in Memphis, Tennessee)," Francois said. "We need to get back to basics and take it back to the streets like our forefathers and foremothers before us. Our president has a moral responsibility to set the mood of peace instead of igniting Violence in this country. We are a divided people of minority groups. Labor can play a part in organizing a coalition by recruiting like-minded groups and bring them together for a majority."**

Last week's Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia claimed the life of Heyer, a 32-year-old paralegal from the state. State Troopers Lieutenant H. Jay Cullen and Pilot Berke M.M. Bates also died when their helicopter crashed near the University of Virginia campus. Many others were also injured in the clash with Neo-Nazi and KKK marchers.

**Héctor Figueroa, president of SEIU 32BJ, invoked Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his condemnation of the white supremacist actions that sparked the mayhem.**

**“As a Union we reject these kinds of hateful actions and encourage our Members, Working Families and the reasonable majority to peacefully stand up against the torch-bearing, Nazi-saluting White Supremacists who are sowing chaos in Virginia,” Figueroa said.**

**“As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said: ‘The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people, but the silence over that by the good people.’ We must denounce intolerance and hate, and demand that the Trump Administration reject these kind of hateful acts that go against the very principles of our country,” Figueroa said.**

Donald Trump, however, characterized the participants in last week's *swastika-laden* rally as “some very fine people.”

Similar White Supremacists rallies are planned for this coming week.

**“Now is a moment for all Americans who believe in freedom and justice, in tolerance and inclusion, to stand up and speak out,” AFSCME Leaders Lee Saunders and Elissa McBride said in a joint statement.**

The Union is *further urging* fellow Trade Unionists and the public at-large to join members in contributing to both the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Anti-Defamation League.

**“The White Nationalism on display this weekend has no place in our communities, our politics or our workplaces,” Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) Leader Stuart Appelbaum said in a statement. “It is our responsibility to stand up against the hateful ideologies that have become alarmingly mainstream over the past year.”**

The RWDSU, itself, became the victim of an anti-Semitic cyber-attack earlier this month, necessitating in the temporary shutdown of the Union's web site.

**National AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka released a statement calling the violence that took place in Charlottesville the “worst kind of evil in our world.”**

**“Any response must begin with our leaders, starting with President Trump, acknowledging this for what it is: domestic terrorism rooted in bigotry,” Trumka said.**

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On Monuments and Minimum Wages  
Conservative lawmakers' defense of Confederate monuments in the South is part of a larger subterfuge to undercut the power of liberal black cities.  
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## On Monuments and Minimum Wages

Conservative lawmakers' defense of Confederate monuments in the South is part of a larger subterfuge to undercut the power of liberal black cities.

BY JUSTIN MILLER AUGUST 22, 2017





At 9 p.m. last Tuesday night, city workers began to enclose in plywood the Confederate monument that sits in Birmingham's Linn Park. By the following afternoon, Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall had announced that he was suing the city for violating state law.

Activists in Birmingham first began calling for the removal of the 52-foot Confederate Soldiers and Sailors monument in 2015, after white supremacist Dylann Roof murdered nine parishioners in a Charleston, South Carolina, church. That, in turn, prompted Gerald Allen, a state senator from Tuscaloosa, to introduce the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act to prohibit cities from removing or altering historic monuments more than 40 years old without the approval of a state committee. The predominantly (if not entirely) white Republicans who control the legislature passed the bill along party lines. Republican Governor Kay Ivey signed it into law in May.

Birmingham Mayor William Bell ordered the monument to be covered amid a renewed and urgent call from activists and officials to remove such tributes to the Confederacy, after white nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia, rallied around a statue of

Confederate General Robert E. Lee and proceeded to attack counter-protesters, killing one woman. Several cities—from Baltimore to San Antonio—have since taken down Confederate monuments while others debate similar actions.

Mayor Bell, who is black, says he doesn't necessarily want to remove the statue—despite demands from local activists—but he does think it should provide a broader context that condemns the Confederacy, rather than celebrates it. “The Confederacy was an act of sedition and treason against the United States of America and represented the continuation of human bondage of people of color,” Bell told the *Prospect* in an interview. “It’s anathema to anyone supportive of the United States government to have such a structure sitting on public property.”

Furthermore, he points out, Birmingham didn’t become a city until 1871, during the post-Civil War Reconstruction era. And the monument wasn’t erected until 1905—50 years after the war ended—when a local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy commissioned the memorial as a gift to the city.

“It’s my desire to no longer allow this statute to be seen by public until such time that we can tell the full story of slavery, the full story of what the Confederacy really meant,” Bell told reporters last week. Now, Bell says, the city is exploring its legal options in light of the state’s lawsuit. The state attorney general is asking a district court to fine the city \$25,000.

“I don’t believe that the legislative body has the authority to dictate what monuments or statues we have on public property. That’s a right that the municipal government should control,” Bell says. “This was built with private dollars and is now protected by the state.

The city should have the power to eliminate any source of contention and to maintain public tranquility.”

### **THE STATE OF ALABAMA'S CRACKDOWN ON**

**BIRMINGHAM** is just its latest attempt to limit the authority of the majority-black city, which has a black mayor and a majority-black city council. In February 2016, the Birmingham city council approved a \$10.10-an-hour minimum wage. Two days later, the Republican-controlled legislature passed a law prohibiting Alabama cities from passing such ordinances and voiding a wage hike for tens of thousands of Birmingham’s low-wage workers.

The experience of Birmingham is indicative of a broader GOP-led assault on the political power and home rule of Southern cities, home to large black populations, often led by black politicians, and, increasingly, purveyors of progressive policies that seek to improve upon the low standards of state law. From the removal of Confederate monuments to the enactment of local minimum wages, Republican-controlled statehouses are preempting blue cities—and undermining black voices.

“These are nothing more than 21st-century Jim Crow laws,” Johnathan Austin, chair of the Birmingham City Council, said of the monument removal and minimum-wage preemption laws in an interview with the *Prospect*. “The state of Alabama is trying to control the [state’s] largest city—and largest black city— by prohibiting us from governing ourselves.”

Twenty-five states—including nearly every Southern state—have laws that prohibit cities and counties from setting their own minimum wage. The five states that have no minimum wage of their own (Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee), adhering to the federal minimum instead, are in the South. Now, at least six states have laws limiting the

power of cities to remove Confederate monuments, with most passed in the last couple years. All of them are in the South, where Republicans control every single legislative chamber. Despite their calls for local control and fewer regulations, state Republicans are now regulating both the cultural and economic authority of localities.

Last year, state legislators passed the Tennessee Heritage Preservation Act of 2016, which requires public notice, hearings, and a two-thirds majority vote of the legislature in order to remove historic monuments. In 2015, North Carolina signed the Cultural History Artifact Management and Patriotism Act, an Orwellian amalgamation of nouns that requires a state historical commission to approve any removal of monuments. Georgia, Mississippi, and Virginia also have similar laws.

In Memphis, a majority-black city, officials are ready to sue the state if it denies its a new waiver request to remove a statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis downtown, as well as a statue of Confederate General and Ku Klux Klan founding member Nathan Bedford Forrest. The move came after the city tried and failed to slog its way through the byzantine maze of GOP-instituted regulations protecting such statues. The matter may very well end up before the state Supreme Court. Legislators in Tennessee, which has the highest proportion of minimum-wage workers in the country, also passed a law in 2014 that prohibits cities from enacting minimum-wage ordinances higher than the state level, which is chained to the federal minimum of \$7.25 an hour.

As Barry Yeoman reported for the *Prospect* last week, protesters in Durham, North Carolina—a liberal city stripped of its authority to take down monuments by the right-wing legislature—found a way around that impasse by pulling down a Confederate statue

themselves. “I understand why people felt this was the most expedient way,” Jillian Johnson, an African American member of the city council, told Yeoman. “There was no legal way to make it happen.”

Meanwhile, the Durham council has also been barred from increasing the minimum wage (save for city employees) by the same infamous legislation that restricted transgenders’ bathroom use.

Durham is just one of dozens of Democratic-controlled cities—Atlanta, Birmingham, Charlotte, Charleston, Durham, Jackson, Nashville, Memphis, and so on, the blue dots in red states—which have lost the authority to raise wages for their (predominately black) workers struggling to get over the poverty line or to remove prominent monuments to a racist and oppressive ideology so their residents don’t have to see a general fighting for slavery looking down on them as they go to work.

Republicans insist that protecting these monuments—the majority of which were built in the early 1900s or during the 1960s—are about preserving the history and heritage of the South. Just as they insist that prohibiting local increases to the minimum wage—which hasn’t been lifted on the federal level in eight years—is about protecting low-wage workers from job loss.

In these ways, GOP lawmakers are actually memorializing the values of the Antebellum South: White supremacy and low—or, rather, no—wages.

*This article has been corrected to clarify that the city of Memphis has not yet sued the state, but intends to if its waiver to remove its Confederate monuments is denied, and that one of the statues is of Confederate President Jefferson Davis.*



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